Common Words Used in Essay Exams

**Compare--**Examine qualities, or characteristics, in order to determine resemblances.

**Contrast--S**tress dissimilarities, differences, or unlikenesses of associated things.

**Criticize--**Express your judgment with respect to the correctness or merit of the factors under consideration.

**Define--**Write concise, clear, authoritative meanings, keeping in mind the class to which the item belongs, and whatever differentiated it from all other classes.

**Discuss--**Examine, analyze carefully, and present considerations pro and con regarding the problems or items.

**Enumerate--**A list or outline form of reply. Recount, one by one, in concise form, the points required.

**Evaluate--**Present a careful appraisal, stressing both advantages and limitations.

**Explain--**Clarify, elucidate, and interpret the material you present.

**Illustrate--**Present a figure, diagram, or concrete example.

**Interpret--**Translate, exemplify, or comment upon the subject, and, usually, give your judgment or reaction.

**Justify--**Prove your thesis or show grounds for decision.

**List--**Present an itemized series or tabulation.

**Outline--**Give main points and essential supplementary materials in a systematic manner.

**Prove--**Establish something with certainty by citing evidence or by logical reasoning.

**Relate--**Emphasize connections and associations.

**Review--**Analyze and comment briefly, in organized sequence, upon the major points.

**State--**Express the high points in brief, clear form.

**Summarize--**Give in condensed form the main points or facts.

**Trace--**Give a description of progress, sequence, or development from the point of origin.

Eight Ways to Abbreviate

**1. Symbols and graphics**

= equal \* important > greater than  
does not equal \*\* very important < less than  
& and # number $ cost, money  
w/ with w/o with out vs versus, against

( ), { }, [ ] = information that belongs together

**2. Abbreviations (don't worry about punctuation)**

cf = compare eg = for example dept = department

NYC = New York City mx = maximum mn = minimum

**3. Use only the first syllable of the word**

pol = politics dem = democracy lib = liberal

**4. Use the first syllable and only the first letter of the second**

subj = subject cons = conservative

**5. Eliminate the final letters; just use enough to recognize the abbreviation**

assoc = association biol = biology rep = repetition  
intro = introduction concl = conclusion info= information

**6. Omit vowels from the middle to words**

bkgrd = background pprd = prepared estmt = estimate  
gov = governor rdng = reading orgnsm = organism

**7. Use apostrophes:**

gov't = government am't = amount cont'd = continued

**8. Form a plural of a symbol by adding "s":**

co-ops = cooperatives libs = liberals /s = ratios

Adapted from: Pauk, W. (1984). How to study in college. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Essay Exam Questions

**1. Remember to read the directions for the exam before you begin.**

**2. Don't study for total recall of names, dates, facts, and figures as you might for an objective test.**

Don't merely memorize material.

**3. Do learn main ideas, key terms, steps in an argument, stages in a process, etc.**

Also memorize verbatim at least some key phrases, definitions, or short passages. These will give an authoritative air to your answer.

**4. Do anticipate exam questions.**If, for example, you have studied both the fall of Greece and the fall of Rome since the last test, you can  
anticipate a question which asks you to compare and contrast these.

**5. Read through the whole test first.**Answers will come to mind immediately for some questions. Jot down key words now while they are fresh  
in mind, but don't start writing your answer.

**6. Budget your time.**Allow enough time at the end to go back and finish incomplete answers and to proofread your paper. When the time is up for one question, stop writing and begin the next one. On a six question exam, for example, six incomplete answers will usually receive more credit than three complete ones, so try not to leave any questions completely unanswered.

**7. Answer the questions you know best first.** And don't panic about any you think you don't know. Stay calm.

**8. Take time to structure your answer, even if you are in a hurry.**

Whenever you can, work from a brief outline jotted down on scratch paper before you begin to write. Select what is clearly relevant; try to avoid a rambling effect.

**9. Come straight to the point in your answer.**  
Make your very first sentence sum up your main point. If you are writing a lengthy answer, summarize the  
key points you intend to make in an introductory paragraph.

**10. Take time at the end to reread the exam.**

Make sure you have answered ALL parts of the question.

**11. Qualify answers when in doubt.**  
It is better to say "Toward the end of the 19th century" than to say in "1884" when you can't remember  
whether it's 1884 or 1894. The approximate time may be all that is necessary, but you may lose credit for  
an incorrect date.

Marking Textbooks

1. **Finish reading before marking.**  
   Never mark until you have finished reading a full paragraph or headed section and have paused to think about what you just read. The procedure will keep you from grabbing at everything that looks important at first glance.
2. **Be extremely selective.**  
   Don't underline or jot down so many items that they overload your memory or cause you to try to think in several directions at once. Be stingy with your markings, but don't be so brief that you'll have to read through the page again when you review.
3. **Use your own words**.  
   The jottings in the margins should be in your own words. Since your own words represent your own thinking they will later be powerful cues to the ideas on the page.
4. B**e brief.**  
   Underline brief but meaningful phrases, rather than complete sentences. Make your marginal jottings short and to the point. They will make a sharper impression on your memory, and they will be easier to use when you recite and review.
5. **Be swift.**You don't have all day for marking. Read, go back for a mini-overview, and make your markings. Then attack the next portion of the chapter.
6. **Be neat.**  
   Neatness takes conscious effort, not time. Later when you review, the neat marks will encourage you and save time, since the ideas will be easily and clearly perceived.
7. **Organize facts and ideas under categories.**  
   Items within categories are far more easily memorized than random facts and ideas.
8. **Try cross-referencing**.  
   For example, if you find an idea on page 64 that has a direct bearing on an idea back on page 28, draw a little arrow pointing upward and write "28" by it. Then turn back to page 28 and alongside the idea there, draw an arrow pointing downward and write "64" by it. In this way you'll tie the two ideas together, in your mind and in your reviewing.
9. **Be systematic.**  
   There are many ways to mark the text: single and double underlines; the use of asterisks, circling, boxing for important items; and the use of top and bottom margins for longer notations. If some of these ideas appeal to you, work them into your marking system, one or two at a time. But use them consistently so you will remember what they mean at review time.

From: Pauk, W. (1984) How to study in college. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Matching Exam Questions

**1. Remember to read the directions for the exam before you begin.**

**2. Determine the pattern of the matching questions.**

Take a moment before you begin answering questions to determine exactly what is being matched. Are they people with quotes, words with definitions, events with descriptions?

**3. Answer the questions you know first.**

Often answers to questions you don't know are supplied in other questions. Go back to answer the difficult questions later.

**4. Choose the longest column to read first.**

One column will generally have more reading material than the other. If you begin by reading the column with the greatest amount of reading, matching it to the column with the least amount of reading, you can avoid having to reread the lengthy material each time.

**5. With each answer cross out the items used from both columns.**

This will help you save time by not rereading the material and help you answer more difficult questions by visually taking you through the process of elimination.

Mnemonic Devices

Mnemonic devices are aids for improving one's memory. These devices can be much more efficient than rote memory techniques (learning by simple repetition). Mnemonic devices are more effective because they generally attach new information to be learned to old information already mastered, or to catch words or phrases that are more easily remembered.

**Jingles**  
days in each month--30 days hath September, April, June and November  
spelling generalization-I before e except after c

**Acronyms** (catchwords)  
the Great Lakes--HOMES  
the only spot in the U.S. where four states meet--CANU

**Acrostics** (catch phrases)  
the colors of the spectrum--Roy G. Biv  
the order of the planets from the sun--My very educated mother just served us nine pickles

**Procedure for Developing Acronyms and Acrostics (Catchwords/Phrases)**

Step 1: Present information to be learned. Underline the first letter of each word.

Step 2: Devise a word or phrase (nonsense or otherwise) using each letter underlined. For example: Psychology - 4 symptoms of schizophrenia 1) withdrawal 2) hallucinations 3) inappropriate emotional response 4) delusions Catchword: whid

For example: Chemistry - 7 diatomic molecules

Bromine, Hydrogen, Chlorine, fluorine, Oxygen, Nitrogen, Iodine

Catch phrase: Brian helps Claire find out new ideas.

If a series of phrases needs to be learned, have the students first circle the key word, or most significant word in each phrase. Then, underline the first letter of each key word and form the catchword/phrase as outlined below.  
For example: Psychology - Abraham Maslow’s theory of basic human needs:  
1) biological need 2) safety need 3) need for companionship 4) esteem need 5) need self-actualization  
Catch phrase: Bob sings clearly each afternoon.

Multiple Choice Exam Questions

**1. Remember to read the directions for the exam before you begin.**

**2. Attempt to answer the question without looking at the options.**

If necessary, cover the answers with your hand.

**3. Eliminate the distractors.**Analyze the options as true/false questions. In a negatively worded question (as in "which of the following  
are NOT . . ." ), put a T or F beside each option, then simply select the false statement.

**4. Never be afraid to use common sense in determining your answer.**

It is sometimes easy to confuse yourself by attempting to recall the "right" answer rather than simply reasoning through the question. Make sure your answer makes sense.

**5. Answer the questions you know first.**

Often answers to questions you don't know are supplied in other questions. Go back to answer the difficult questions later.

**6. When guessing, do not change answers.**

Research indicates your first answer is usually best. However, don't be afraid to change answers when you have a good reason for doing so.

**7. When guessing, choose answers that are not the first or last option.**

Research indicates that the option in the middle with the most words is usually the correct response.

**8. Answer all questions.**  
Unless points are deducted for incorrect responses, leave enough time to answer all questions.

**9. If the first option is a correct one, look at the last option to make sure it is not an "all of the above" option.**

The same is true for the "none of the above" question.

**10. If options appear similar, chances are one of them is the correct response.**The same is true for quantities that are almost the same.

**11. Allow time at the end to check for carelessness.**

Note Cards

Creating and using note cards can alleviate anxiety about remembering facts throughout an academic term as well as provide a portable study tool. An additional advantage of using note cards is to present written information out of sequence. This will help you learn the information free of association to the information it proceeds and follows.

**Procedure**

1. 3 x 5 cards can hold important information from notes and reading. Write the cue or question on one side of the card and write the definition, description or answer on the other side.

2. Begin compiling the cards early in the term. Carry the cards with you and review the information many times during the day and evening.

3. The information that does not come to mind readily can be reviewed more often or placed in a "critical" stack. Repetition is the best way to learn the material.

Note Taking

1. Full-sized, three-ring notebooks are best for containing all lecture notes, handouts, and notes from the text and readings. Why? Pages can be arranged chronologically with pertinent handouts inserted into lecture notes for easy reference. If you miss a lecture, you can easily add the missing notes. Course materials are together in one notebook.

2. Date and number your note pages and your handouts. It will help with continuity.

3. Give yourself plenty of blank spaces in your notes, as well as plenty of room to write. This will allow you to make additional notes, sketch helpful graphics, or write textbook references. Your notes will be easier to read if you write in pen and use only one side of the paper.

4. Law-ruled or summary-margin paper is helpful with its three-inch margin on the left side of the page. If you can't find this paper, draw the margin on each piece of paper. This sets one up for using the Cornell format of note taking. Write your notes on the right side of the line. After the lecture, use the left margin for key words or phrases, or sample questions when you review the notes.

5. Take as many notes as you can. If you miss something, leave a space; you may be able to fill in the blanks later. Do not stop taking notes if you are confused or if you want to ponder a particular concept. You will have time for that later. Abbreviations are extremely helpful. Suggestions for abbreviations are listed in this section.

6. It may be difficult to make your notes look great or to have them extremely organized as you write them. Work with your notes as soon after class as possible when your recall is at its best. You may be able to fill in some blanks. Color coding can bring some organization to your notes. For example, identify concepts and categories by highlighting items with a particular color. If you still have problems organizing your notes, begin to formulate a specific question for your professor or study groups.

7. As you review your notes, look at the information as answers to questions. As these questions become clearer to you, jot down the questions in the left margin. You may also write key words or phrases in the left hand margin that cue your recall of definitions, theories, models, or examples. Now you are ready to try to recall the information in your notes. Cover the right side of your notes, leaving only these cues (whether there are questions or key words) to test yourself.

8. As you begin to put the material of the course together, add a somewhat generic question - WHY? - to your answers. You need to know why any particular answer is correct. You need to know why the information is pertinent to the course. This will also prepare you for essay exams, as well.

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Reading Textbooks

1. As GSO leader, ask yourself the following questions:

a. What should students know when they finish this chapter? What are the major concepts that the students should understand? What supporting information or details should they remember on a long-term basis?

b. What should students be able to do when they finish the chapter? What background information is essential to perform the required task?

2. Draw attention to the items you believe are important for success in this course. Ask students why the items are important.

3. Encourage students to read assignments before the topic is discussed in class. Suggest that previewing the reading sets them up to better manage their time and information gathering. From time to time do this

together in GSO sessions.

4. Review how to read charts, graphs, and diagrams. Discuss the importance of understanding the information gleaned from the graphic.

5. Help students formulate questions from textbook headings, vocabulary, and diagrams.

6. Integrate lecture notes with readings. Does the information in the text complement or extend the lecture information?

7. Show students how to supplement their notes using the index of the text. For example, topics may not be addressed within the pages assigned. Check the index to see if the topic is addressed in another section of the text.

**Textbook Activities**

1. Write a study guide for a chapter in the textbook. Distribute this to students attending GSO. Encourage students to prepare their own study guides for other chapters.

2. Have students compare two sources of information about the same topic - the text and the lecture. Note information found in both sources as especially important.

3. Preview chapters during the GSO sessions.

4. Have the students survey the chapter for several minutes.

5. Occasionally, the instructor assigns text chapters, but tests only on class notes. It is not a bad study skill for a student to eventually realize this and use the text only as a backup to the notes. Avoid suggesting the text is not important, but gradually de-emphasize it during GSO if you find this to be the case.

Short-Answer/Fill-in-the-Blank Exam Questions

**1. Remember to read the directions for the exam before you begin.**

**2. There are few if any "tricks" for this type of exam question.**

Only one of a dozen publications on "test taking skills" surveyed for this topic had a category for short-answer/fill in the blank questions (this entry contained only two paragraphs that were each only two lines long)!

**3. It is best to "over study."**

You need to know your subject backwards and forwards; the chances are that you will either know it or you won't. Unlike an essay test you will not have the opportunity to reveal what you do know in place of what you don't.

**4. Answer the questions you know first.**

Often answers to questions you don't know are supplied in other questions. Go back to answer the difficult questions later.

**5. When you prepare for the exam, focus on facts and key words.**

Look over the materials as though you were going to write the exam. Try to predict questions appropriate for this type of exam.

# Test Taking Tips

**How to Prepare For and Take a Mathematics Test**

(Excerpts from Mastering Mathematics: How to Be a Great Math Student, Third Edition by Richard Manning Smith.)

**How to Aim for Perfection in Your Test Preparation**

1. What is the number one goal of test preparation? Always aim for 100%.

2. How do I begin my study process? Construct a list of all possible topics that may appear on the test.

3. What should I never say about a potential topic? Never omit a potential topic from my list with the comment, "It probably won't be on the test."

4. How can I eliminate my chance of having a mental block? Eliminate the chance of having a mental block by thoroughly covering all the possible topics.

5. When I make excuses for not doing well, what does that say about my test preparation? It says that my problem is that I didn't study enough to do well.

6. When should I begin my test preparation? Begin preparation at least a week before the test.

**How to Make a List of Topics That Might Be Covered on the Test**

1. What's the first thing I should do when my teacher announces a test? Ask for the rules and scope of the test. (What will the test cover?)

2. How should I begin my test preparation process. Make a list of topics that might be covered on the test.

3. What should I include in a topics list for a test? Include all possible topics that might be covered on the test.

4. What should I include for each topic on my list? Include a reference list of problems from the text or other sources that deal with the topic.

5. How difficult should the problems be that are chosen for each topic? In addition to the typical, standard level of problems, choose some of the more challenging problems.

**How to Master Each Topic**

1. What strategy will allow me to achieve mastery of all the possible topics? I can most easily master all the topics by achieving mastery one topic at a time.

2. When should I not attempt to memorize in my studying? I should never attempt to memorize a formula (or rule, procedure, or proof of a theorem) until after I have made a significant attempt to understand it.

3. What is the goal of the ACE steps and Review procedure? The ACE steps and Review procedure is intended to help me achieve the one-topic-at-time-until-total-confidence goal.

4. What are the three ACE steps?

1. Answer each problem by working it out in writing.

1. Confirm that the answer is correct.
2. Examine my understanding of the problem by asking myself the following questions: “What was the point of the problem?" "What errors do I need to avoid when working out problems of this kind?"

5. What is the Review procedure? This is the final step to achieving the one-topic-at-a-time-until-total-confidence goal. It requires that I clear up all of the questions and uncertainties in my notes and textbook concerning the topics on my list.

How to Take a Mathematics Test

1. When should I arrive for a test? Arrive early at the classroom.

2. What should I do as soon as I receive the test? Read the directions carefully. Look through the test quickly to estimate how much time to allot each question.

3. Which questions should I answer first? Answer the easiest questions first.

4. What should I do if I am unsure whether to change my first answer to a question? Rethink the answer. Don't automatically think the first answer is correct. Do not let yourself get bogged down on one question. Mark it to come back to.

5. What should I do if I finish the test early? Check my answers. Do not rush to leave the room.

6. How can I use my graded test when I get it back? Use it to help identify ways to improve my study habits for the next test Review and correct each error made on the test.

**True/False Exam Questions**

**1. Remember to read the directions for the exam before you begin.**

**2. Determine the number of questions and budget your time.**

Many times when True/False questions are given there are a large number of questions. If so, answer each question quickly. It may not be worth a lot of time to get one question right if the question is only worth two points on a 100 point test.

**3. Read each question carefully.**Remember that if any part of a statement is false, the entire state is false. Most questions contain a  
combination of who, what, when, where or how facts. If any one of those facts is wrong, the statement is  
false.

**4. Look for qualifiers.**Words like never, all, none, only, and always generally indicate a statement is false. One the other hand,  
sometimes, generally, often, frequently and mostly indicate that a statement is true.

**5. Answer the questions you know first.**

Often answers to questions you don't know are supplied in other questions. Go back to answer the difficult questions later.

**6. When guessing, do not change answers.**

Research indicates your first answer is usually best. However, don't be afraid to change answers when you have a good reason for doing so.

**7. Answer all questions.**  
Unless points are deducted for incorrect responses, leave enough time to answer all questions. Mark all  
remaining or unfinished questions true; in a true/false exam a slight majority of the answers are usually  
true.

**8. "Reason" statements tend to be false.**

When something is given as the "reason" or "cause" or "because" of something else the statement will tend to be false.